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# Two life rings stolen from pier

Friday, 18, 2004

By Terry Judd

**CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER**

One week after life rings were installed on the Grand Haven south pier, thieves stole two -- from the exact same location.

Grand Haven Department of Public Safety Director Dennis Edwards said a life ring from the second bracket along the south pier catwalk was taken Tuesday. Officials quickly installed a spare only to have its replacement stolen Wednesday. It, too, has been replaced. Each ring is worth about \$50.

The life-saving devices were among 14 installed along the catwalk a week ago in response to two drownings off the south pier last year. A 15th life ring is expected to be installed at the end of the pier later this month.



"It's a shame two had to be taken so early in the game," Edwards said. "We are looking at a variety of options to discourage this activity."

Edwards said his department has lined up the services of a sign-painter, who will letter each ring as a memorial to those who drowned off the south pier, and will specifically list Andrew Fox and Daniel Luke Reiss, who both drowned last year.

"The idea is to memorialize these victims and to make anyone who thinks about taking a life ring feel guilty," he said.

The department is examining installing video cameras and other monitoring equipment for the south pier. Public Safety officials also have been in contact with the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office to see whether anyone

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caught stealing a life ring can face a more serious charge of destroying police property rather than a simple larceny charge. They also will be approaching Silent Observer to see whether a reward can be offered.

The life rings, mounted every 10 feet on the south pier catwalk, were recommended by the Great Lakes Beach & Pier Safety Task, a group formed to better educate the public on the dangers of navigational structures and rip tides.

The task force was formed last November and includes representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service, Michigan Sea Grant, Grand Haven Area Public Schools, the American Red Cross of Ottawa and Muskegon counties, Muskegon and Ottawa County health departments and the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation.

Installation of the life rings on the south pier was the result of negotiations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and research showing the city's insurance carrier would cover any liabilities associated with the life rings. The life rings, which cost \$650, were purchased through a donation by Roxanne Reiss, whose son, Daniel Luke Reiss, 19, was swept off the south pier Nov. 29 and drowned. Brackets for the rings were manufactured and donated by Active Manufacturing Co., 422 N. Griffin, the employer of Vicki Cech, whose son, Andrew Fox, 17, drowned last Sept. 3 off Grand Haven State Park.

The city and the task force also are working to install an information sign at the foot of the south pier, alerting walkers and swimmers to the dangers of Lake Michigan and smaller signs warning of rip currents. The task force also is organizing a "survivors" beach game Aug. 15, in which area teen-agers will compete in life-saving oriented games such as a life ring toss.

Cech said thievery was a concern of the task force and she is shocked two rings have been already taken.

"I am very shocked," she said this morning. "It amazes me that someone would think of taking a life saving device. I really upsets me. I can't imagine what is going through someone's mind by taking something that could save a life."

She said the task force might consider signs around the life rings warning potential thieves that may cause a drowning by stealing a life ring.

Besides the life rings, the public safety department is raising money to purchase 29 water rescue suits and ropes for public safety road officers and detectives. Commonly known as Mustang suits, the highly buoyant gear was designed for the U.S. Coast Guard to protect the wearer from the effects of cold water. Each suit will cost about \$1,130. The department held a kick-off fund-raiser Tuesday.

Public Safety Sgt. Mike Grillo said the fund drive is designed not only for the rescue suits but to create a fund to replace missing life rings and to help the beach and pier safety task force. Donations can be sent to the city of Grand Haven at 525 Washington, Grand Haven, MI 49417. Checks should be made out to the city and designated for Mustang Suits.

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